

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 18409

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR, UR, UK

SUBJECT: BRITISH CHIEF RABBI VISITS USSR

REF: MOSCOW 17863

1. BRITISH CHIEF RABBI, IMMANUEL JAKOBOWITZ, TOLD EMBOFF THAT HE WAS PLEASED WITH HIS NINE-DAY VISIT HERE. HE VISITED MOSCOW, LENINGRAD AND KIEV. IN MOSCOW, HE ADDRESSED THE CONGREGATION FROM THE PULPIT DURING SABBATH SERVICES. BESIDES HIS MEETINGS WITH MEMBERS OF THE CONGREGATIONS IN THE THREE CITIES, HE TALKED WITH THE HEAD OF THE ALL-UNION OVIR, WITH ACADEMICS TEACHING HEBREW AND JEWISH HISTORY, AND WITH OFFICIALS OF THE PATRIARCHATE. RABBI JAKOBOWITZ EXPLAINED THAT ALTHOUGH HE WAS HERE AS A GUEST OF THE SOVIET UNION, (IN FACT HE WAS INVITED BY THE HEAD OF THE MOSCOW JEWISH COMMUNITY), HE STILL FOUND IT POSSIBLE TO MEET MOST OF THE IMPORTANT MEMBERS OF THE DISSIDENT COMMUNITY IN MOSCOW AND LENINGRAD. HE ALSO GAVE A PAPER AT THE "UNDAY SEMINAR."

2. THE RABBI COMMENTED THAT HE WAS IMPRESSED WITH THE VIGOR OF THE JEWISH LIFE IN THE USSR. HE EXPLAINED THAT
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HE WAS NOT REFERRING TO ATTENDANCE AT SYNAGOGUE, BUT WITH THE EXTENT TO WHICH JEWISH CULTURE AND JEWISH CON-

SCIOUSNESS CONTINUED TO EXIST AND EVEN TO FLOURISH. HE SAID THAT HE DEPLORED THE LACK OF UNITY AMONG SOVIET JEWS, WHO, HE FELT, SHOULD TRY TO ORGANIZE NATIONALITY. AS IT IS, HE NOTED, GEORGIAN AND BALTIC JEWS TEND TO CONSIDER THEIR OWN PROBLEMS IN ISOLATION FROM THOSE OF THE RUSSIAN JEWS. IMPLICIT IN THIS COMMENT WAS THE SENTIMENT THAT THEY TENDED MORE TO IDENTIFY WITH THE LOCAL NATIONALITIES MORE THAN WITH THE REST OF THE SOVIET JEWISH COMMUNITY. THE RABBI SAID THAT HE HOPED THAT THERE COULD BE CREATED SOME ALL-UNION INSTITUTIONS-- HE MENTIONED SPECIFICALLY, A JOURNAL IN THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE--THAT COULD BE USED TO BIND THE DIFFERENT JEWISH GROUPS TOGETHER.

3. ASKED ABOUT HIS CONVERSATIONS WITH OVIR, JAKOBOWITZ SAID THAT HE HAD DETECTED NO SIGNS OF ANY CHANGE IN POLICY ON EMIGRATION. AS HE REHEARSED THE ARGUMENTS HE HAD HEARD, IT WAS CLEAR THAT HE HAD BEEN GIVEN THE SAME LINE AS THAT WHICH RECENT AMERICAN CODELS HAVE RECEIVED. THE RABBI SAID THAT HE WONDERED WHETHER THE WEST WAS RIGHT IN FOCUSING ITS ATTENTION ON THE DISSIDENT "REFUSENIKS." HE THOUGHT THAT A GOOD CASE COULD BE MADE FOR THE WESTERN JEWISH COMMUNITIES TO TRY TO HELP SOVIET JEWRY BY SUPPORTING JUDAISM IN GENERAL IN THE USSR. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT HE ADMIRE THE DISSIDENTS FOR THEIR COURAGE, AND SYMPATHIZED WITH THEIR PROBLEMS, BUT FELT THAT THE GREAT MAJORITY OF SOVIET JEWS, WHO HE SAID DID NOT WANT TO LEAVE THE USSR, DESERVED HELP FROM ABROAD TOO.

4. JAKOBOWITZ SAID THAT HE STILL DID NOT FULLY UNDERSTAND WHY HE HAD BEEN INVITED, BUT IN ANY CASE WAS PLEASED TO HAVE COME. HE SAID THAT HE THOUGHT THAT THERE COULD BE MORE SUCH VISITS, AND THAT THE MOSCOW RABBI WOULD BE INVITED TO THE UK NEXT YEAR. WHILE HE ADMITTED THAT HE DID NOT EXPECT ANY REAL IMPROVEMENT IN THE LOT OF SOVIET JEWS, JAKOBOWITZ SAID THAT HE WOULD TRY AND EXPLOIT TO THE MAXIMUM THE LITTLE LEVERAGE THAT HIS VISIT HERE GAVE HIM. HE FELT THAT A FEW MODEST STEPS
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COULD BE TAKEN, AND ADDED THAT HE INTENDED TO BE MORE ACTIVE IN HELPING THE SOVIET JEWS THAN HE HAD BEEN UP TO NOW.
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